



Thory, Kathryn (2016) Developing meaningfulness at work through emotional intelligence training. International Journal of Training and Development, 20 (1). pp. 58-77. ISSN 1468-2419 , <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12069>

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Developing meaningfulness at work through emotional intelligence training

Abstract

To date, there remains a significant gap in the Human Resource Development (HRD) literature in understanding how training and development contributes to meaningful work. In addition, little is known about how individuals proactively make their work more meaningful. This article shows how emotional intelligence training promotes learning around sources of meaningful work and documents managers' experiences of independently applying what they have learnt about meaningfulness from the EI training to the workplace. Data is collected from participant observations and interviews with trainers and managers attending three externally provided, 'popular' EI training courses. Interpreting the data through Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009, 2011) model of meaningful work enables a clear articulation of managers' capacity to shape their work environments to create four, interconnected sources of meaningfulness: inner development, expressing one's full potential, unity with others and serving others. Findings also exemplify structural and agential constraints when individuals attempt to create meaningful work. Practically, the study demonstrates the importance of training to enhance work of value and significance and offers recommendations for practitioners.

Introduction

To date, management and organizational scholars have been interested in meaningfulness because it is considered 'good for business'. For example, research has examined the sources and processes of meaningfulness because of salient outcomes on worker engagement, attachment, motivation, productivity and satisfaction (e.g., Hackman and Oldham, 1980; May, Gilson and Harter, 2004; Spreitzer, Kizilos and Nason, 1997; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Research also shows there are personal benefits of purpose and meaning including increased happiness, greater longevity and reduced risk of stress and illness (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Hill and Turiano, 2014; Knoop, 1994).

Given the reported gains, organizations would benefit from developing work characteristics which promote meaningfulness. One potential approach stems from training and development. In the Human Resource Development (HRD) literature, development themes are implicit in meaningful work given the emphasis on self-actualization, life purpose, engagement (Fairlie, 2011), fulfilling inner needs (Bates, Chen and Hatcher, 2002) and bringing the whole self to work (Chalofsky, 2003). Work also becomes meaningful when strategies such as continual learning, improving competencies, developing worthwhile relationships and stimulating work are introduced (Chalofsky and Cavallaro, 2013). Equally, HRD stands as a leading discipline to support and guide organizations in teaching employees about meaningfulness. Despite this, HRD has yet to make a significant contribution to the work meaningfulness literature (Chalofsky, 2003), especially in areas of training and development. Just as important, little is understood about meaningful work from the employee's perspective; in other words how do individuals themselves make their work more meaningful (Fineman, 1983; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Vuori, 2012).

One useful way to attend to these omissions is to investigate employee training that focuses explicitly on frameworks of meaningfulness and explore how these teachings are then applied at work by the individual. To achieve this end, this article directs attention to an exploration of emotional intelligence (EI) training. Whilst it is well known that emotional intelligence's central concerns are recognizing, understanding and regulating emotions and handling relationships (Goleman, 1998; Thory, 2013), the concept has also been linked to work meaningfulness and self-actualization (Bar-On, 2001, 2010; Goleman, 1998; Orme and Bar-On, 2002). Following this, the aim of the study is to provide an understanding of how managers actively create and develop meaning in their work after attending an emotional intelligence training course. Through a focus on meaningfulness, this project makes a novel contribution to a small but growing body of scholarly work on EI training (e.g., Clarke, 2010a; 2010b; Groves, McEnrue and Shen, 2008; Slaski and Cartwright, 2003; Thory, 2013; 2016). Moreover, it uncovers new, empirical insights, which may explain why EI continues to be popular in business and industry.

This article explores the following research questions: How does emotional intelligence training promote learning around meaningful work? What are managers' experiences of applying

teachings on meaningfulness to the workplace after attending EI training? What are the tensions and constraints for managers attempting to apply EI teachings on meaningfulness to their work? Theoretically, the study draws on Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) framework, which describes sources of meaningful work from the individual perspective. By highlighting the structural and agential tensions and constraints to enhancing meaningfulness at work, the article provides further theoretical insights into the topic. The first section of the article briefly reviews the meaningfulness at work literature and introduces Lips-Wiersma and Morris's model. Next, emotional intelligence skills and aptitudes are described and mapped onto the meaningfulness framework to show how elements at work that constitute worth and value can be realized through EI training. This section is followed by the methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion.

Meaningfulness at work

The term meaningfulness refers to the amount of *significance* something holds for an individual, (Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Questions such as 'what do I live for?', 'why am I here?', 'what is truly important to me in life?' convey enquiries into meaningfulness portending to experiences of worth, existential significance or purpose of life. In management studies, May et al. (2004:14) define meaningful work as: 'The value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual's ideals and standards'. Ghadi, Fernando and Caputi (2013: 22) define the term: 'When an employee feels, experiences and perceives that the tasks they undertake in the work have a reason, and when performing those tasks provides them with a sense of significance, this demonstrates meaningfulness'.

HRD plays a potential role in developing work characteristics or antecedents which promote meaningfulness such as career development, training, feedback and mentoring. For example, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) examine organizational practices that foster employees' experiences of meaningfulness including employee involvement, nurturing callings and enhancing various forms of leadership. Equally, HRD stands as a leading discipline to support and guide organizations in training and teaching employees about meaningfulness. Yet, to date HRD research has largely focused on

employee engagement, viewing meaningfulness as one aspect of engagement (Fairlie, 2011; see also Shuck, 2011 for a review). Other HRD accounts have explored the *meaning* of work (the *type* of meaning employees make of their work) rather than *meaningfulness* (the *amount* of significance attached to work) (Rosso et al, 2010: 94) (c.f. Ardichvili and Kuchinke, 2009). Thus, HRD has yet to make a significant contribution to the work meaningfulness literature (Chalofsky, 2003), especially in areas of training and development.

Moreover, little is understood about meaningful work from the employee's perspective (Fineman, 1983; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009). For instance, the way employees (not organizations) proactively and independently shape their work environments to create meaningfulness has been poorly addressed in the literature (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Vuori, 2012). In the sparse writings, scholars have explored callings (Wrzesniewski, 2003), sensemaking, job crafting (Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001) and employees' practice of increasing positive cues (Vuori, 2012). Yet, these address only some ways that individuals independently enhance the value and worth of their work. Overall, this paucity of research seems surprising given that individuals can feel strongly responsible for meaning making at work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009:497) and have agency to do so (Berg, Grant and Johnson, 2010; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001). Compared to company practices (e.g., job design, leadership), individuals' day-to-day acts of meaning making may be just as significant in their contribution to organizational and individual gains. Yet, when organizations lack resources to fulfill employees' deeper, existential needs, the onus lies on the individual to influence the qualities of their work. Thus, greater understanding of how individuals actively create and develop sources of meaningfulness at work is a topic of considerable interest.

In a recent management review, Ghadi et al. (2013) describe ten models that they categorize as either work-related or human-centered frameworks of 'work as meaningful'. In a similar attempt to give structure and integration to the literature, Ross et al. (2010) identify a number of mechanisms and sources of work meaning. However, in a field of research littered with different definitions, theories and measurements (Ghadi et al., 2013; Martela, 2010; Rosso et al., 2010), core criticisms refer to a lack of clarity of definitional terms, a narrow examination of 'singular factors or processes

contributing to the meaning of work' (Rosso et al., 2010:93) and a lack of consensus over what constitutes antecedents, sources and mediators of meaningfulness. For example, Baumeister (1991) claims that the search for meaning stems from four sources or needs: Purpose, values, efficacy and self-worth, whereas Rosso et al. (2010) identify sources of meaningfulness to include the self, others, work context and spiritual life. At the same time, there are obvious economic, social and political hurdles to positioning existential value at the heart of an organization's human resources strategy. Such considerations must account for the ongoing struggle, towards coherency and completeness, that lies at the heart of a meaningful life (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012:656).

Based on extensive empirical accounts of individuals' work and life, Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) have developed a multidimensional model of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; 2011). Highlighting themes of 'self' vs 'others' and 'being' vs 'doing', the framework identifies four sources of meaningfulness: Developing the inner self (self/being), expressing full potential (self/doing), unity with others (others/being) and serving others (others/doing). What makes Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009, 2011) model particularly attractive is its careful focus on the source of meaningful work itself through an articulation of deeper layers of individuals' need (e.g., belonging, growth, connection and development) (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). Also noteworthy, the framework amalgamates multiple sources of meaningful work which have been explored theoretically and empirically in management studies, sociology and the humanities (e.g., moral development in the humanities). In doing so, the model acknowledges it is often a combination and interplay of sources which enhance the meaning employees make of their work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009). Given the model's strengths, it has been chosen as the focus of this article. The four sources are next described.

Developing the inner self is an inward and reflective process, based on being true to oneself, wanting to be a good person, becoming one's higher self or the best one can be (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009, 2011; Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012). For example, meaningfulness is experienced as a result of being one's authentic self by maintaining one's unique identity. As Munn (2013) explains, enjoyment in a job is greatly influenced by whether we feel we have the freedom to be ourselves at work. Opportunities to be authentic occur when a person acts in accordance with personal values and

beliefs or experiences task, role, structures and work interactions which affirm one's self concept (e.g., as a leader). Similarly, Chalofsky (2003) refers to bringing the 'complete' or 'whole' self to work (mind, body, emotions, spirit) as a constituent of work meaningfulness.

Active and outward directed in nature, the second dimension is *expressing one's potential*. This refers to meaningfulness found in expressing talents, creativity, influencing others and having a sense of achievement. For example, achieving refers to mastering or completing something, gaining recognition, achieving success, feeling competent and effective or improving standards (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2011) Influencing describes meaningful acts such as getting others on board, inspiring others, improving conditions, offering direction, drawing attention to important issues and setting an example (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2011).

The next source, *unity with others*, refers to meaningfulness derived from working together with others. Organizations are a key source of connection, collegiality and belongingness for employees, providing meaningfulness through group identification, shared values and group roles (e.g., Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Pratt and Ashforth, 2003). Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) model relates to three themes: A sense of shared values; belonging; and working together. Sharing values entails articulating and having values in common. Belonging reflects connection, companionship and being part of a group. Working together conveys increased power resourcefulness that is stimulated from group dynamics (e.g., energy, motivation, stimulation), mutual support and fun (Lips-Wiersman and Morris, 2011).

The fourth dimension, *serving others*, refers to meaningfulness derived from making a contribution to the wellbeing of others and the world we live in, such as helping an individual or making a difference in society. Examples include giving back, helping others grow, supporting others in hard times or speaking up or challenging ideas that do not benefit employees (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2011). There is ample evidence that when employees are able to provide something of value to other members of their organization they experience greater purpose and influence which is perceived as meaningful (Grant, 2007; Kahn, 1990).

Unlike other frameworks, Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) model pays particular attention to the tensions between being/doing and self/others. For example, where there is limited time to 'be'

(contemplate or reflect for inner development) and when too much service to others creates exhaustion and martyrdom. The model also highlights that there is always a pull-push tension between the ‘inspiration’ and the ‘reality’ of organizational life. Usefully, the model shows how employees are torn between the rhetoric and reality of wholeness and integration as an ‘ongoing dynamic’ (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012:656). For example, daily battles for resources, a focus on profit-related goals are inter-twined with the need to share and live organizational goals and receive professional development.

Importantly, Lips-Wiersma and Morris’s (2009) model has yet to be applied to a training context where employees are taught the four sources of meaningfulness and then given the opportunity to apply that learning to the workplace. Moreover, opportunities to better understand the structural and agential tensions and constraints when individuals attempt to create meaningful work would provide further theoretical insights into the model. For example, scholars contend that the meaningfulness literature has failed to fully explore whether hierarchical status affects work meaning and whether access to meaningfulness in work is elitist (Rosso et al., 2010:117). Equally, much of the meaningfulness literature tends to overlook the point that not everyone is searching for meaning at work. Referring to the ‘tyranny’ of wellness and positivity in contemporary organizations, Warren (2010:318) poses the question - what if the employees who choose to engage such qualities (being self-actualized, driven, engaged, resilient, optimistic) elsewhere to enhance the quality of their lives? Thus, it has been overlooked that work-related teachings on meaningfulness could lead to a decreased effort and productivity at work when individuals make the decision that a meaningful life is more important.

How emotional intelligence contributes to meaningful work

Emotional intelligence was first introduced by academic researchers as an ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions in oneself and others (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Since then, the concept has been popularized by writers such as Daniel Goleman (1998) and portrayed as a set of emotional and social skills (Bar-On, 2004; Goleman, 1998; Higgs and Dulewicz, 2002). For example,

Goleman (1998) describes Emotional Intelligence as the skills or competencies to be able to know one's own emotions, manage one's own emotions, self-motivate as well as recognize others' emotions and handle relationships. Termed as 'mixed' or 'trait' models because critical commentators argue they belie a mixture of affective, personality and motivational traits and dispositions (Jordan et al., 2010; Matthews, Zeidner and Roberts, 2002), emotional intelligence has become a major management trend in contemporary organizations. EI's popularity is accounted for by promises of huge financial and performance gains (Bar-On, 2004; Boyatzis and Sala, 2004; Cherniss, 2001; Goleman 1998). Despite much criticism over conceptual, theoretical and measurement issues (Day and Kelloway, 2004; Matthews et al., 2002; van Rooy and Viswesvaran, 2004) the broader skill-based models are the most popular in commercial settings (Bar-On, 2004). More recently, as demonstrated in meta-analyses, there is evidence that popular (or 'trait') EI models contribute to performance and productivity (Joseph and Newman 2010; O'Boyle et al. 2011). Amongst the mixed or EI models, the most frequently used are Bar-On's (2000) Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) and Goleman's Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) (Boyatzis and Sala, 2004), which are the focus of this study.

To date, the connections between emotional intelligence and meaningfulness at work have been under-explored despite clear associations made (e.g., Bar-On, 2010). The first way emotional intelligence promotes meaningfulness is through its emphasis on emotional self-awareness (recognizing and understanding one's emotions) (Boyatzis and Sala, 2004, Bar-On, 2004). We can only know what is meaningful if we recognize and understand the emotions evoked by what is significant in our lives (Kraus, 1997). For instance, the ability to decipher and use emotional information accurately may enable a person to select a meaningful line of work and be successful in their chosen career (Grewal and Salovey, 2006).

Emotional intelligence is also linked to work meaningfulness through its skills or competencies of 'self-actualization', 'achievement drive' and 'influencing' (Bar-On, 2004; Goleman, 1998; Orme and Bar-On, 2002). Bar-On (2010:59) explicitly includes the skill 'self-actualization' in his model, arguing: "Self-actualization involves a lengthy process of attempting to realize one's potential and searching for a more meaningful life". Similarly, Goleman claims that people have the choice and opportunity in their work lives 'to gravitate to what gives them meaning, to what engages

to the fullest their commitment, talent, energy, and skill' (Goleman, 1998:58). Goleman's (1998) model also includes the competency 'achievement drive', defined as 'striving to improve or meeting a standard of excellence' as well as the skill 'influencing'. Thus, through these themes, EI is equated with an ability to achieve personal goals, persuade others and become one's best self, all of which resonate with evidence-based sources of meaningful work (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009, 2011). In addition, Bar-On's (2004) model includes the aptitude 'authenticity' which may additionally encourage individuals to be true to whom they are at work, as a form of developing one's inner self.

Other links are forged with meaningfulness because emotional intelligence models emphasize civility, service, social responsibility and the nurturing of social relationships (Bar-On, 2004; Cooper and Sawaf, 1997; Orme and Bar-On, 2002; Goleman, 1998). For example, Bar-On's (2004) model includes the competency 'social responsibility', defined as the ability 'to identify with one's social group and cooperate with others'. Bar-On and Goleman include a range of social skills in their models such as 'interpersonal relationships', 'teamwork and collaboration' and 'developing others'. Given the substantial evidence that co-worker relationships enhance work meaningfulness (Kahn, 1990, May et al., 2004; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009) it seems likely that the social skills components of emotional intelligence could enhance belonging, unity and social connection which are sources of meaningful work. The competency 'social responsibility' in Bar-On's model is also likely to emphasize 'serving others'. In addition, empathy underpins many of the social competencies in the mixed EI models. Integral to relationship building and creating a sense of community, empathy helps people to understand others more effectively (Goleman, 1998; Mayer and Salovey, 1997). Equally, emotional self-awareness can lead to honest and sincere exchanges, enabling interactions to be experienced as genuine and respectful which can generate a sense of belonging. In turn, both emotional self-awareness and empathy may lead to meaningful work because these skills promote unity with others which is a key source of work meaningfulness (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Rosso et al., 2010).

Given these connections, EI training provides an ideal context to explore how sources of meaningfulness can be taught to individuals and how these teachings are applied to work. In doing so, it addresses two key gaps in the HRD-meaningfulness literature: training and employee agency.

To fulfill this aim, the research study explores voluntary attendance at open EI programs, run by external consultancies. When training is not a requisite of employment or one's role it is more likely to capture managers' own volition and independence in applying the teachings to work. The study seeks to understand how participants alter their work tasks, relationships, behaviours and mindsets to promote sources of meaning and their reflective valuation of their work as a consequence of attending the EI training. This article explores the following research questions: How does emotional intelligence training promote learning around meaningful work? What are managers' experiences of applying teachings on meaningfulness to the workplace after attending EI training? What are the tensions and constraints for managers attempting to apply EI teachings on meaningfulness to their work?

Methodology

This article presents findings which are part of a larger qualitative study that explores EI training and its application at work in a management population. The purpose of this research study was to comprehend managers' reflective experiences and insights (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999) across the three EI programmes studied. To do this the study adopted a case study approach. Case studies provide insights into contextualized organizational processes particularly within exploratory research (Merriam, 1988). Although a case study does not enable analytical generalizations (Yin, 1994), it allows theoretical understandings.

Data were collected from three EI training courses, labelled 'Bar-On', 'Goleman' and 'Hybrid', based on the popular EI models they adopt. Table I provides details of the three training providers, the duration and location of the course, content covered during the training, the generic influences of each course and the trainer's background/experience. As Table I shows, all three training courses focused on developing a wide set of EI 'skills' and 'aptitudes'.

INSERT TABLE I HERE

The research methods adopted were 40 hours of participant observation during the training courses where the researcher was fully immersed as a participant, semi-structured interviews and analysis of training documentation (training manuals, supplementary books, hand-outs and other presentational documents). The researcher conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with participants, of which 27 were with training delegates and four with training consultants (two trainers participated together in one interview). Participants came from a broad cross-section of industries, including IT (1), banking (4), manufacturing (3), energy (2), local government (4), police (1), education (2) pharmaceutical/medical (3), consultancy (5), transport (1) and animal welfare (1) (numbers of participants are in brackets). Most participants were aged between 35 and 50 and had more than three years of managerial experience. The sample composed of eight line, twelve middle and seven senior managers.

The sampling strategy for interviewees was steered differently by each training consultancy. On the 'Goleman' course the trainer emailed the participants prior to the event notifying them that there would be a researcher on the course who wanted to learn more about EI. At the beginning of the training day the researcher was introduced to the group by the trainer. On the 'Bar-On' course, the researcher was briefly introduced to the delegates by the trainer in the morning on the first day. Time was spent chatting to participants during coffee and lunch breaks briefly outlining the general aims and objectives of the study and inviting them to participate. On the 'Hybrid' course participants were recruited prior to the training day via email invitation. Across all three courses, the majority of participants attended the training voluntarily, and this was paid for by their employer.

Manager interviews took place three to four months after the training, to give them the opportunity to try out the EI teachings and practices learnt on the course. Trainers were interviewed shortly after the training programme. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. All participants agreed to their interviews being recorded. All interviews were transcribed manually in full by the researcher, resulting in 310 pages of interview data. Participant observation notes amounted to over 100 pages of data.

The interview topic guide with the trainers explored the content, aims and emphasis of the EI course and its evolution. Themes around fulfilling work, authenticity and meaningfulness were explored as these had been key areas on the courses, especially the Bar-On programme. Additional lines of discussion opened up around key reasons for managers to attend EI courses and what influenced them in designing the course. The interviews with managers were split into three parts: Their reasons for attending the EI course; their experiences of the training event; their application of EI teachings and ideas at work after the course; any outcomes or changes at work as a consequence (performative and mindset). The application of EI questions were structured around themes relating to the situation, with whom, aspect of EI used, purpose, gains and constraints. As part of this, participants were reminded of the content of the programmes where necessary, in terms of the key 'skills' or 'aptitudes'. Additional questions included: How would you describe EI in a nutshell? What was the most beneficial and impactful aspect of the training for you? To what extent do you think EI is a skill, trait or value or something else? To what extent is EI about being yourself, being authentic? Does EI promote meaningful social relationships? On the training courses, 'live' note taking throughout each training day focused on visible trainer presentation and delivery of the training material. This enabled a focus on data which was of high quality and easy to collect (Silverman, 2005). Discreet but extensive note taking was possible throughout the five training days because all participants sat at tables writing notes. Notes were fully written up at the end of each training day. These notes and trainer interviews created the basis for reporting how meaningfulness featured in the EI training. A diary was used to record thoughts, ideas, feelings and reflections on the data throughout the data collection period and to capture a running record of analysis and interpretation. The same research journal was maintained into the data analysis and writing period to record summaries of key points, issues raised, questions, suggestions, concepts and ideas (Bazeley, 2013).

In this study meaningfulness was an emergent theme which initially surfaced during the Bar-On training course. This elicited a few specific questions in the interviews but overall the theme became more apparent during data analysis. Initially, the interview transcripts were read and re-read. Next all the interview audio-recordings were re-listened to. Both these activities served to build a sense of the whole picture, before the data were broken down (Bazeley, 2013). Next all interview

transcripts were annotated with comments, thoughts and observations. A key observation which surfaced from this phase was participants' frequent referrals to instilling practices which met deeper, existential needs (belonging, growth etc.), and which often transcended organizational demands. Other related themes emerged from the empirical material including a fulfilling life, morality and social responsibility. It was at this point that the EI frameworks and literature were re-examined for meaningful themes, e.g., self-actualization, transparency, social responsibility, achievement drive, etc.

The next stage involved making notes of emerging themes in the participant interview transcripts focusing on each situation that managers applied EI teachings to generate sources of meaning at work, and their valuation of these changes. These 'incidents' were frequently identified via participants' recollection of the relevant EI skills or themes which had stimulated the altered work practice, task, relationship, mindset and consequential shift in valuation of their work (its significance, worth, value, meaningfulness). The events were sorted and given preliminary codes then revised and adapted accordingly to slowly generate concepts. At this point themes of 'self' and 'other' started to emerge as well as instances when actions were rooted in more strategic goals. In parallel, the trainer interview transcripts, observation notes and research diary were analyzed. The training observation notes and trainer interview transcripts helped to contextualize the meaningfulness themes and how much they were emphasized. At this point, appropriate theoretical frameworks were reviewed. Through an iterative process of data-theory interplay, shaped by theoretical insights produced by the data, the analysis enabled a taxonomy of the meaningfulness features of EI to emerge which mapped onto Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) framework.

Data quality (validity) was addressed in several ways. Moving from smaller to larger data sets to obtain a larger sample of cases of meaningfulness themes was part of a comprehensive data treatment approach. In this way, all events where managers referred to key EI themes in relation to Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) four meaningfulness sources and enhanced value, worth, and significance of work were classified, categories were saturated and there was a regularity of uses both within and across each training programme (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Even in deviant cases or variations, respondents did not depart from the analytical themes (Silverman, 2005). They still viewed EI in relation to sources of meaningfulness concepts but chose to interpret them more strategically,

e.g., self-interested achievement drive; calculative empathy. In complement, the theme of meaningfulness was acknowledged and discussed in detail in the trainers' interviews, particularly on the Bar-On course. Overall, coherence and integration of the data were achieved by presenting subtleties in the rich qualitative data (Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999) whilst using Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) framework of sources of meaningfulness.

Findings

How meaningfulness features in EI training

Across the three EI training courses there were multiple exercises, instructional sessions and discussion which explored the theme of meaningfulness. In many instances the core competencies in the EI models were the vehicle for this focus, as this section illustrates.

Each training programme aimed to develop participants' emotional awareness through a number of exercises. These exercises (e.g., facial recognition software exercise, EI self-assessments, visualization and relaxation exercises, 'ranking' emotions, base-line model of emotion, explaining the amygdala hijack) explored self-awareness and awareness of others' emotions. The trainers explained that identifying and understanding others' emotions was useful for empathy, diffusing emotional situations and influencing others. During these exercises, emotional self-awareness was frequently associated with happiness, fulfilment and satisfaction at work. For example, integral to the self-fulfillment message was getting in touch with one's emotions, to better understand, as Angie, one of the trainers expressed on the Hybrid course: 'What makes you tick, are you happy, are you fulfilled?' She explained that the course was about raising participants' consciousness to determine how happy they were in their roles, job and company and to help managers become their 'best self'. During the interview she explained the EI training taught managers how to 'consciously create the experiences they really want instead of allowing life and other people to make those decisions for them - by better understanding their emotions'. In this way, the trainers linked the ability to identify and understand one's emotions to the ability to pursue work experiences that made them happy and fulfilled.

Fulfilling work was a core theme across all three EI programs. This was especially evident on the Bar-On course via a discussion of three themes: ‘Happiness’, ‘self-actualization’, and ‘achievement drive’. ‘Self-actualization’ was defined by the trainer as ‘realizing one’s potential, striving towards maximum development, pursuits which lead to a rich and meaningful life and having goals and a sense of purpose’. Key to this was an encouragement for participants to better understand who they were, what they wanted to do in life, what they could do and enjoyed doing (Bar-On, 2010). For example, managers were asked to identify five things they wanted to achieve in their lifetime then complete a life spreadsheet of goals. Next, they were introduced to the wheel of life which depicted key aspects of one’s life (career, family and friends, health, money, personal growth, fun and recreation etc.). Participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with each domain and explore how balanced their lives currently were when all domains were taken into consideration. In the introduction to these exercises the trainer explained ‘try to avoid too many actions that are meaningless in life’. Training participants were also given several exercises to prioritize their values, focusing on different domains (home, work etc.). During the interview, Martin, the trainer, elaborated on this:

“A tremendous number of individuals that go through the [emotional intelligence] programs I am involved in are looking to ask some fundamental questions about ‘am I in the right job? Am I in the right place? Who am I really?’ to get some other way or some other tools of assessing their talents and capabilities because a lot of people suspect that they’re not having as fulfilling a challenge in their life or perhaps not making as big a contribution to something that identifies who they are” (Martin, Trainer, Bar-On).

Mark, a senior consultant attending the Bar-On course, summed up the EI message in this way: “It [EI] gives you a framework in which to examine yourself. It says look to lead a good life, to have a fulfilling life, be happy with yourself, improve and develop yourself, reach your best potential”. Relatedly, all three courses included a discussion of goal setting and motivation with a focus on achieving significant and valuable work goals and developing one’s career. Influencing skills were also covered which drew on abilities in understanding, anticipating, responding to others’

emotions and fears, recognizing what is important to other people, acknowledging individual differences and asserting oneself.

Other key themes on the EI programs included being one's true self, personal growth through the practice of virtues and moral development. On the Bar-On course the trainer stressed that leaders 'need to bring character to work rather than their persona', and delegates were given a short introduction to authentic leadership. In different ways the Hybrid and Goleman courses emphasized the importance of authenticity, character and genuineness as part of being an emotionally intelligent manager. For example, the Goleman course emphasized accepting individual differences between people. Authenticity was also addressed through emotion skills including the need to be emotionally expressive and honest in certain work situations. The Goleman course also addressed being a 'good person' via a lengthy coverage of the EI aptitude 'transparency'. This was described as 'maintaining standards of honesty and integrity'. In a similar vein, the Bar-On course made reference to positive psychology strengths (VIA classification of strengths and virtues) including wisdom, transcendence, courage, love and humanity, justice and temperance. The trainer asked participants to personally reflect on how important these attributes were in management and leadership roles.

On the Bar-On course, the competency 'social responsibility' was introduced and participants were asked to think about how they identified with groups at work and co-operated with others. Martin, the trainer, explained that social responsibility was like an inner moral compass and delegates should think about their boundaries of 'belonging'. He continued: 'Aside from balance at work, employees want a sense of belonging and most people consider this to be very important. The glue of belonging is offering to help others and asking for help'. Throughout the Bar-On course many references were made to fostering good social relationships at work through skills in empathy, relationship management, happiness and optimism. As part of the discussion on empathy, the trainer explained 'As a leader and manager, it is your responsibility to get to know your followers'. Social relationships were addressed on the Goleman and Hybrid course but sometimes with a more instrumental tone from the trainers. For example, the Goleman trainer referred to balancing empathy with business goals.

Developing the inner self

A key thematic strand on all the EI courses was being true to or being one's authentic self. In response to this message, 25 of the 27 managers interviewed believed EI gave them permission to be themselves, framed as a valuable work achievement with undertones of therapeutic value of fulfilment. Here Ron, a senior manager, described this:

“And that was one of the things Martin [trainer] talked about during the course which was to try and be the same person in business as you are at home. And what I've learnt is doing the managing director's role the first six months I was trying to be what I thought a managing director was rather than be myself.” (Ron, Senior Manager, Bar-On).

Ron reported that he was securing more business contracts because meetings were more relaxed and consultative as a consequence of 'being himself' in his leadership role. He explained that maintaining his own unique identity at work made his work feel more meaningful. Some participants found that greater self-acceptance led to increased work productivity. For example, Nadia now felt more comfortable with being her 'true' self which helped her realize her potential at work: “I'm much more accepting and relaxed within me and I think when I'm more relaxed within myself my equilibrium is correct and I'm more effective at work. That's enhanced my self worth which has impacted on how I value my work”. Several other participants reported that bringing one's 'true self' to work contributed significantly to work because it resonated with their personal values, beliefs and standards. Here Malcolm, a leadership consultant explained:

“The qualitative thing is more and more the permission to be myself, so as a coach, just be your authentic, genuine self. Don't try and be somebody else, don't put on any airs and graces, don't try to impress, just be grounded with the person and be yourself and be authentic. So the course has given me more confidence and more recognition of my values of being myself when I engage with people and how meaningful that is” (Malcolm, consultant, Bar-On).

Overall, many respondents spoke of increased intrinsic satisfaction and value from an authentic selfhood at work and referred to this varyingly as character, personality, genuineness or individuality. Jim, Head of Benefits Realization, felt EI represented 'individuality' but this uniqueness

of character conflicted with what his organization wanted ‘people to all behave in a very similar manner’.

Turning to other themes of inner development, participants spoke of emotional intelligence in moral and ethical terms using phrases such as ‘heart of the matter stuff’ and how EI helped them become ‘a good person’, their ‘higher’ or ‘complete self’. For example, the VIA classification of strengths and virtues introduced on the Bar-On course prompted reflections on ‘goodness’ and morality (e.g., justice, temperance). Referring to themes of wisdom and integrity, Malcolm explained: “I see Emotional Intelligence as aligned more on the moral and ethical way of being and that’s how I apply it. He continued: ‘It’s transformational stuff and makes a point of difference in my life’. Much of this was expressed as a journey of growth or ‘becoming’ one’s whole self (full circle) as Ivan, a process engineering manager, explained: “I think EI can help me to become who I am destined to become. If you took it as a circle, people have different diameters of circle. When you start off you’re like a dot in the middle but as you go through life you grow until you become your full circle. For me, this journey feels significant at work”.

Overall, developing the inner self became a strong need amongst participants. The EI teachings justified this as a valuable and worthwhile pursuit which added meaning to their work through (reflective) exercises, lecture-style instruction and discussion of emotional self-awareness, authenticity, ‘being yourself’, strengths and virtues, integrity and a message of continual growth.

Expressing full potential

Given the three courses placed an emphasis on goal setting, motivation and ‘achievement drive’, many participants reported that they were more focused on what they genuinely wanted to achieve at work, making their job more satisfying, valuable and worthwhile. Grant, a highway services manager explained this:

“I’m very much happier at work. I think I sat down and said where am I going? I looked at my goals and standards and what is realistic, what are the priorities, what do I need to do to get there and now this year’s development has aligned with how I want to progress my career and that is very rewarding ” (Grant, Manager, Hybrid).

However, it was evident that some managers used the achievement theme to pursue their own personal success and singular ambition. For example, Adrian referred to EI skills as ‘tactical tools’ to ‘pull on others’ heart strings’ when trying to influence staff. Some intimated EI could be used for ‘manipulation’ or viewed EI as a magician’s bag of tricks to further their own ambitions.

Other training delegates spoke of work becoming more meaningful by using influencing skills from the course. This enabled them to get issues addressed, change another’s viewpoint or fight for employee rights at work. Sara, an administrative manager commented: “The fact that I have a voice and I should be heard and I should be able to have an opinion came from the course”. Prior to the EI course she had been unhappy at work and was considering handing in her notice. Now she felt more valued by colleagues because she was able to influence significant business decisions which made her work feel more significant overall. Other managers also spoke of improved powers to change a viewpoint or decision. Angus explained that much of his work was about influencing stakeholders which he valued because he could instigate change. He went on to explain how he was more capable of persuading his team: “A lot of emotional intelligence is around influencing people to be honest. I’m taking people with me now and getting them motivated and bought in to what we’re doing. That gives more meaning to what I’m doing at work”.

For Stan, a sales manager on the Hybrid course, the EI training helped his influencing skills by: “Understanding how everybody is different. Everybody is a completely different person so how you deal with each person is different.” Managers frequently commented that EI had taught them that everyone has different feelings, values, aspirations and perspectives which helped them better influence, inspire and get others on board. As a consequence, they reported doing ‘good things’ at work.

For three of the 27 managers interviewed, the theme of expressing one’s talents and full potential in significant and meaningful ways led to work resignations. For example, Esther, a managing director, had been inspired to change career path as a consequence of attending the Bar-On EI course and was now applying for jobs in a completely different field which met more holistic life goals and aspirations, which she explained: ‘ gives my life more resonance’. However, pursuing one’s life calling seemed to discriminate against those who did not have equivalent skills and financial

resources to change professions or job. Indeed, Claire, a junior office manager (Hybrid course) who worked in an environmental government agency, was quick to point out her gratitude for having a manager who was mindful and responsive to providing her with meaningful work, intimating not all managers or organizations are like this.

Unity with others

From the three EI courses, themes of empathy, building social relations, belongingness and using character strengths (integrity, humanity) enthused managers to be more collegial and 'in contact' with peers and subordinates. A large number of participants reported spending more relaxed, quality time with staff as a consequence of attending the EI training course. For some it was about connecting with others by making them feel important, as Samantha, a leadership adviser (Goleman course) explained: "I see emotional intelligence as being how we interact with others, its making individuals feel they are valued and listened to. It's taking time out to get to know people and for them to see that they are valued by you as a colleague". For Samantha an open, honest and 'holistic' approach to her mentoring schemes, underpinned by valuing others and reinforced by the EI course, was deeply valued by her: "The ability to be genuine and energize and enthuse staff for the schemes is really important to me because I see how these schemes can benefit people."

Elaine, an office manager (Hybrid course) now spent time making tea for her team and chit-chatting. She commented 'Its hard to put into words but I genuinely talk to whoever's coming in properly rather than being snappy, so I am more aware of being in the now with people. And that connection with colleagues, emphasised on the course, is really important to me'. These acts of building unity with others were conveyed as a worthy and valuable departure from previous managerial styles. Similarly, Ron commented: "And that is where emotional intelligence helps because it encourages me to have a bit more dialogue with people and say 'what's going on at home, how's things, this is what I'm doing' and it just really opens up the environment". When asked if these messages had changed his view of work he commented 'I feel there's more value in what I'm doing'. What Sally, a pharmaceutical director (Hybrid course), took from the EI training was a stronger need to build personal relationships with her staff during the three year plant closure which

lay ahead. This more hands-on approach, she explained, tied strongly with her personal values which helped to give her work more meaning during this challenging period.

Since attending the Bar-On EI course, coming to work every day for Pippa, a Hardware Services manager, was more about a desire to have ‘a sense of belonging’, as she described it. She continued: ‘I couldn’t be a home worker; although its useful to work at home on the odd day but its not something I could do on a permanent basis because the social interaction is so important to me and the EI course reinforced how much I value that sense of belonging at work’. However, she highlighted the tension between the idealized ‘togetherness’ of teams and their de-prioritization by management when the pressure is on:

“There’s a big emphasis on the people side of things when everything’s going smoothly or we have staff opinion surveys and when the results are not good, people worry about the staff. But the priority is the service we provide. So if there’s any incident, the people side goes out of the window.” (Pippa, Hardware Services Manager, Bar-On).

Equally Jim, who attended the Goleman course, explained a similar tension between working together, sharing values in teams and the economic imperative:

“I find it very hard to get people to alter the way they interact so they feel they belong to a community. Because if they are rewarded on short term deliverables then they’re not going to think about the longer term picture and I think that’s endemic across the whole organization”.(Jim, Middle Manager, Goleman)

Both of these narratives demonstrate the tensions managers felt from trying to justify the value of ‘unity’ when there are work crises or when the focus is on short-term, profit-related goals. Equally, for others like Esther who attended the Bar-On course, the values exercise centered around meaningfulness prompted a refocusing on being with family and working fewer hours. Several managers reported changes in focus – to spend more time on what gave them meaning outside of work because of EI’s focus on emotional self-awareness, happiness and fulfilling lives.

Serving others

Being aware of others’ emotions, the ‘social responsibility’ competency, human virtues, values and integrity were key skills or attributes discussed in the training. These EI teachings enabled participants

to be more empathic in their care of duty at work, to help others grow, support staff during difficult times and challenge ideas that did not benefit their staff. Carol, a director of a college explained how the Hybrid EI course gave a label to what she was already doing:

As far as I'm concerned, my job is to facilitate the growth and development of everybody. So, all the members of staff that I work with, at whatever level, I look at where they're at in their development as a whole person and I try and work with that. I think I've always done that but it wasn't until I discovered emotional intelligence that I thought 'ah that's what I'm doing' (Carol, Director of College, Hybrid).

Carol described this as a 'process of enlightenment', continuing: "So I think that it [EI] does help people; I think it makes it a better world if you like." For Pippa, the EI course made her realize that her priority at work was to make her staff happy by enhancing their wellbeing. She was now using the EI training to make her team 'feel important and getting them involved' by giving them more one-to-one time, being more empathic and listening more. She did not care if she was not promoted anymore: "I came away [from the course] thinking I want to manage people, I want to manage people well and if that results in me getting promoted then fine but if not, as long as I'm happy and my staff are happy that's probably the most important thing". For Vera, a middle manager attending the Hybrid course, the EI training affirmed her caring managerial style, characterized by frequently going above and beyond the call of duty. This included an 'open door' management style to 'mop up' subordinates' daily anxieties and concerns, such as when they were going through difficult times or being mistreated by others. She explained 'I now stop people using others for their own ends because I'm understanding and managing people's emotions better and that makes my work feel important'.

For several managers, including Esther and Helen, a human resources manager, EI raised their consciousness of, and concern for, moral dilemmas which may have been unacknowledged in their work before the course. Helen indicated that many of her decisions were moral juggling acts within the confines of economic constraints. She explained how HR decisions are sometimes about ethics of care and doing the correct thing for employees and 'not just doing something and paying lip service to it'. Whilst she was using more empathic negotiation skills learnt from the EI training to

bring in practices to support the wellbeing of her staff, she acknowledged the tensions between the ‘inspiration’ and ‘reality’. Equally, she was keen to point out her battles at work had jeopardized her own health and she had been forced by her doctor to redress the balance between ‘serving me’ and ‘serving others’. These struggles were indicative of other managers’ tightrope walk between serving work colleagues in meaningful ways without sacrificing one’s own wellbeing, given the tough business environment many alluded to.

In sum, EI teachings were used to strengthen or enhance managers’ commitment to serve others and this appeared to have existential significance (e.g., on a mission, making the world a better place, moral acts). These acts resonated with managers’ own values and purpose in life and for many the causes seemed to transcend the daily expectations of organizational life. This is not to discount, though, the times managers used EI to build social relationships in a more instrumental capacity or serve others strategically for personal or mutual benefit. For example, Adam, Head of Customer Connections, was keen to point out that ‘relationships in the organization are there for a purpose although that sounds terribly callous’, denoting a cool detachment and a balance between real and fabricated care.

Discussion

The three research questions are returned to for discussion.

How does emotional intelligence training promote learning around meaningful work?

In this study, trainers explained that it was reasonable and appropriate to have meaningful experiences at work. The EI training endorsed this through teachings, discussions and (reflective) exercises on themes or competencies of emotional awareness and understanding, happiness, self-actualization, achievement drive, influencing, goal setting, motivation, social responsibility, social relationships, empathy, human values and virtues, transparency (honesty and integrity), optimism and authenticity. As part of this, fulfilling work was a core theme on all three EI courses. For example, the ability to identify and understand one’s emotions was linked to the ability to pursue work experiences that made participants happy and fulfilled. On the Bar-On course fulfilling work was explored

through happiness, self actualization and achievement drive. Authenticity, human virtues, character and genuineness were emphasized as core aspects of EI relating to developing the inner self on all three programmes. Expressing one's potential was explored through themes of goal setting, achievement drive and motivation. Themes of being with others and serving others surfaced on all the EI programmes to varying degrees through discussion of social relationships, social responsibility, empathy, happiness, optimism and emotional self awareness.

What are managers' experiences of applying teachings on meaningfulness to the workplace after attending EI training?

Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) model provides a framework to understand how meaningfulness was articulated, legitimized and (re)instated on managers' agendas through EI training. It did this by showing managers' reflective accounts of altered work patterns, relationships, behaviours and mindsets and their reported valuation of their work after these changes as more meaningful. Similar to Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009:503) study, many managers appeared to have 'known this all along' and found this 'reclaimed knowledge' as powerful and satisfying. As Rosso et al. (2010:115) point out: 'Individuals are the ultimate arbiters of the meaning of their own work, as shaped through the lens of their unique perceptions and experiences'. Interpreting the data through Lips-Wiersma and Morris's (2009) model enables a clear articulation of managers' independent capacity to shape their work environments to create sources of meaningfulness. Thus, the study demonstrates that managers have the agency to cultivate meaningfulness at work through their own volition (Berg, Grant and Johnson, 2010; Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009; Vuori, 2012; Wrzesniewski and Dutton, 2001).

Almost all the managers interviewed engaged in transfer by using 'developing the inner self' teachings to be themselves at work. Furthermore, developing the inner self reportedly impacted on managers' intrinsic satisfaction with work. In some cases it improved work productivity and it may have improved inter-personal skills. Half of the managers interviewed drew on achievement drive and influencing themes to make their work more meaningful by 'expressing one's potential'. In turn, this increased job satisfaction for some respondents. It also appeared to make managers more effective

because they developed clearer goals and better influencing skills, although staff turnover can also be a result. In addition, two-thirds of the respondents reported to be adopting increased practices in ‘unity with others’ or ‘serving others’ at work as a consequence of attending the EI training course. Managers reported numerous benefits from ‘unity with others’. For example, Sally claimed that spending more time with staff on the shopfloor had maintained productivity despite news of the site closure and others reported a calmer work atmosphere. ‘Serving others’ seemed to help maintain a collegial work atmosphere and help subordinates grow, feel supported and cared for. Overall, the impact of the EI training on promoting sources of meaningful work in this sample was considerable. The meaningfulness themes applied by managers working in different business contexts suggests that meaningful work is an topic of genuine interest for a broad management population.

Moreover, it was not uncommon for managers to see the sources of meaningfulness themes as interconnected (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2011). For example, combining unity with serving others as core needs seemed to enhance the meaning of Ron’s work. At the heart of the EI themes, what drove managers’ actions was a deeper layer of need such as community and connection, doing good things, growth, learning, achievement and being the best one could be (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012).

What are the tensions and constraints for managers attempting to apply EI teachings on meaningfulness to their work?

In this study numerous tensions were identified. Oftentimes ‘meaningfulness is a constant process of searching for, articulating, balancing, struggling with, and taking responsibility for the human need for meaning’ (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012:663). There is no point of arrival but a continual search instead. One is always toiling towards balance and rarely does one get it right but the conscious quest itself helped managers recalibrate and identify what was meaningful to them (Lips-Wiersma and Wright, 2012: 661). For example, agency-communion tensions were evident between short term deliverables/crisis management and unity and community at work. Frequently, it was meaningful itself to discuss the tension between the ‘inspiration’ and ‘reality’. Verbalizing the rhetoric grounded managers’ discussions served to enhance meaningfulness. When ideals are not

discussed within a context of material reality, the discussion itself can become meaningless and actions futile (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2009).

The findings also demonstrate that being/doing, self/others and ‘inspiration’ towards an ideal and ‘reality’ are all intertwined within the work sphere and outwith. Creating a complex web of influences, these themes were consciously and reflectively juggled by managers. For example, as an HR manager, Helen’s quest to fight practices which were to the detriment of her staff cast her as a ‘moral agitator’. Yet, her focus on others was taking its toll on her own health, and she was aware she was running the risk of being ‘washed away by others’ (Lips-Wiersma and Morris, 2011:86). Bridging the work-life divide, Esther and others wanted to focus more on family life (unity with others outwith work) rather than relentlessly pursuing work achievements. But, at the same time, Esther was seeking more self-actualizing work elsewhere, demonstrating the interplay between the different sources (unity and expressing one’s full potential). This raises an important point for our understanding of the meaningfulness at work literature. In keeping with Warren’s (2010) observations of the wellbeing and positivity movement, this study highlights that when participants’ awareness of what is meaningful is raised on an EI training course, the outcome does not always benefit the organization. Meaningfulness at work models, including Lips-Wiersma and Morris’s (2009) model tend to overlook the constraint that meaningfulness may be sought in other life spheres to the detriment of the organization, even when the training is largely work focused, as it was in this study.

Equally, some employees are not searching for meaningfulness at work. This is another constraint which tends to be overlooked in the meaningfulness literature. For example, even when meaningfulness teachings are directed towards non-instrumental gains, people may still use the themes for material and strategic self-interest. Indeed, Stan, Graham, Ivan, Adrian and Adam were quite focused on expressing their full potential with a more instrumental intent. For example, whilst EI kept pulling Adam back to developing social relationships of value (‘I’ve got to know people I wouldn’t have otherwise’), there was always an appropriated tone to his story. Others spoke of EI skills as ‘tactical tools’ to ‘pull on others’ heart strings’ when trying to influence staff.

Moreover, it tended to be the senior managers (three out of seven interviewed) in this study who had the power and resources to work fewer hours to create more time for meaningfulness outwith work without being challenged or reprimanded. In addition, it was the senior managers in this study who had substantial social and economic capital to pursue alternative career paths in pursuit of greater meaningfulness (three out of seven). More junior staff expressed gratefulness for jobs that were fulfilling. Sara, who was close to resigning prior to the EI course, intimated this was a last option for her and her family. Whilst not conclusive, the findings in this study suggest that securing meaningful work could be elitist and exclusionary (Rosso et al., 2010). At the same time, managers across the whole sample reported ways in which they were generating meaningfulness at work so this is clearly not exclusive to senior managers. Whereas if this study had chosen a lower status, non-managerial sample, this might not have been the case due to individuals' limited agency.

Overall, constraints to transferring the meaningfulness themes included managers focusing on meaningfulness outside of work which led to decreased productivity/hours at work, managers not valuing meaningfulness as a work pursuit, increased staff turnover and the effects of hierarchical status.

Conclusion

Given the popularity of meaningful work and its organizational gains in management research, Human Resource Development stands as a leading discipline to support and guide organizations in training and teaching employees about sources of meaningfulness. This study provides empirical evidence that sources of meaningfulness are a core ingredient of EI training when popular EI models are used (Bar-On, 2001, 2010; Orme and Bar-On, 2002; Goleman, 1998). It demonstrates how a framework of meaningfulness embedded in EI can provide insights into how it is promoted and how those teachings can be applied independently at work.

Practically, it demonstrates the important role meaning making has for managers' work. It is suggested that training and development in meaningfulness has more utility when: the material reality versus ideals are openly discussed by participants; consideration is given to how much legitimacy someone feels to command worthwhile work given it will vary considerably between a senior

manager and low-skilled worker; multiple sources of meaningfulness are covered in training (rather than one dimension) and viewed as working in complement with each other. Equally, there is a difference between skills (e.g., social skills, influencing, emotional awareness) and character traits and attributes (e.g., integrity, morality, authenticity) when using EI training to promote meaningfulness. Clearly skills can be learnt but attributes may be more inherent or deeply socialized. HRD practitioners must be cognizant of this difference when focused on discussing sources of meaningfulness in workshops and training. Moreover, it is vital to remember that not everyone desires work of significance, value and worth. Finally, because the training in this study focused on sources of meaningfulness (denoting fundamental needs), training could extend to exploring feasible and practical antecedents at an organizational level, e.g., job design, career development, appraisals, mentoring, leadership, coaching, feedback as well as spatial re-designs to promote communal break-out areas and rest spaces.

It is suggested that future qualitative research further explores comparisons of managers, leaders and employees to better understand the enablers and constraints across different hierarchical levels. A limitation of this study is that the meaningfulness theme cannot be considered widespread practice on all popular EI training. However, despite the varied and hybridized content, the EI courses provide important insights into the material realities of promoting meaningful work through participants' rich accounts and training observations. In addition, the findings are based on self-report data of actions and attitudes rather than any corroborated or observed evidence of what took place.

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